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AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

STUDENTS

OF DICKINSON COLLEGE,

CARLISLE.

By the Rev. CHARLES NISBET, D.D.

ON HIS RE-ELECTION

TO THE OFFICE OF

PRINCIPAL OF SAID COLLEGE.

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AN ADDRESS, &c.

MY YOUNG FRIENDS,

AFTER despairing even of life, and renouncing all hopes of being useful to this seminary, it has pleased God to restore me to my former health and office. I hope it will be unnecessary for me to say any thing to convince you of my good will to this country, and to this College in particular. If abandoning an honourable and independent station, and renouncing the society of many valuable and long tried friends; if my crossing the vast Atlantic, and exposing my life to the perils of a new climate, are not sufficient to persuade you of my good wishes, it will be needless to use any words to that purpose.

The troubles and distresses of my family, and the pains I have endured, both in body and mind, since my arrival in this country, I shall chearfully forget, if I shall be enabled to be subservient to the conducting of your studies and forming your taste and morals, so that you may fulfil the hopes of your parents, and prove useful citizens to your country.

You are here assembled from various parts, and must have different views and expectations in life, but I hope you are all agreed in the desire of learning, and resolve to cultivate the powers of your mind, from a conviction that the knowledge you may acquire here, will enable you to fill with dignity and propriety the several stations to which you may be called; and to contribute your parts to promote the happiness, and to raise the reputation of this new and rising empire.

It is of the utmost consequence to your progress in learning, that you form just notions of its dignity, and importance to the public as well as to yourselves as individuals It is not to spend your years in idleness and dissipation, or to acquire a superficial tincture of letters, that you have been sent hither with so much trouble and expence by your parents. They expect something more solid and useful in return for their pains and charge on your

your account.—They hope that you will aſpire to excellence and diſtinction in your ſtudies, and that honeſt emulation which a public education produces, will engage you to an uſeful and diligent employment of your time here. You are now in the moſt pleaſant and the moſt important time of life: your powers are freſh, and eaſily ſuſceptible of improvement; and the impreſſions that you receive at this time muſt be of the utmoſt importance in determining your future fates and characters. Your preſent rank as ſtudents is honourable. As candidates for ſcience, fame, and conſequence, you ought to deſpiſe every thing that is mean and diſhonourable, and think your time too precious to be ſpent in trifles or vicious purſuits.

A ſuperficial application to learning is ſo far from being uſeful that it is greatly prejudicial. It fills the mind with confuſed notions, and ſometimes with unſufferable vanity: it tends to bring learning into diſgrace, and leads the world to form falſe notions of its tendency and importance. It creates a contempt and averſion to ſtudy, and is apt to communicate its baneful influence to future generations. It places the ſtudent on a level with the forward ſmatterer, whoſe learning is extracted from magazines and reviews, and whoſe pertneſs ariſes only from his ignorance.

It is true that all are not endowed with equal powers for making progreſs in letters, and that different ſtudies are ſuited to different tempers and characters: yet diligence, application, and conſtant deſire of ſucceſs, will carry every man as far as nature intended he ſhould go; and the various branches of ſtudy in which you are exerciſed, will point out to every ſtudent what he is beſt qualified for, and develope the natural bent of his genius, ſo as to direct him how to employ himſelf in future. But without application we can make no diſcovery of our talents, and the indolent ſtudent muſt continue a child for life.

To encourage you to diligence, you ought to conſider that you have our reputation, as well as your own fame and intereſt, in your hands; and that much of the happineſs and ſatisfaction of your parents depends on your preſent behaviour, and the manner in which you employ your time and talents. After a pretty long life ſpent

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in the purſuit of learning, and undergoing ſo many dangers and troubles for promoting its increaſe in this country, I flatter myſelf that I have a name to loſe; and you would do me a ſenſible and grievous injury, if it ſhould be loſt by your negligence. With regard to my colleagues, I need ſay nothing, as you know their capacity and characters by actual experience. We all have an equal intereſt in your progreſs, as the world will not believe us to be good for any thing, unleſs you appear to be profited by our pains and inſtructions. Your parents expect that you ſhould return inſtructed and improved in the knowledge of men and things, that you ſhould be qualified for uſeful and diſtinguiſhed ſtations in life; and you cannot do juſtice to them, or to us, except by a diligent application to your ſtudies, and a conſtant attention to moral duties.

You muſt be ſenſible that the greateſt pains and diligence on our part will be quite abortive without your hearty conſent and concurrence. To talk to the deaf, or, which is the ſame thing, to the thoughtleſs and inattentive, is labouring without pleaſure and without profit, and muſt be extremely afflicting to every ſenſible and benevolent mind —You have it in your power to render all our labours unſucceſsful, and to baffle all our hopes of reputation and uſefulneſs; but we hope you will not be ſo ill-natured as to employ your power for ſo vile a purpoſe, eſpecially as it muſt at the ſame time involve yourſelves in ignorance, inſignificance, guilt, and miſery.

We would therefore beg, as the greateſt favour to ourſelves, as well as the beſt ſervice you can do to your own character, to the intereſt of your parents and the public, that your conſent may conſpire with our wiſhes to promote your beſt intereſts: you muſt ſee the neceſſity of ſuch concurrence, and the miſchievous conſequences of refuſing it. Let us always find you in a readineſs to be inſtructed, and a deſire of excelling in thoſe branches of knowledge in which you are to be exerciſed. The habit of attention, and a conſtant endeavour to underſtand and retain the inſtructions of your teachers, will make your ſtudies eaſy and pleaſant, as well as profitable to you; and unleſs you make your ſtudies your pleaſure, your ſituation as ſtudents will be exceedingly painful and uncom-

uncomfortable, your attendance will be a burden: you will live the life of priſoners, conſtantly diſpleaſed with your preſent ſituation, conſtantly longing for a change, with the diſmal conſciouſneſs that you are loſing your time, and that your ſufferings are intirely without profit to yourſelves or others.

With regard to your behaviour to us and to one another, we hope your parents have taught you the rudiments of good manners, and that you will not diſgrace their inſtructions and example, by petulence, impertinence, or rudeneſs of any kind.—The child who behaves rudely and improperly to others, diſhonours his father's houſe, and gives others an occaſion to believe that he has been illy educated, or that his parents have ſet him a bad example. A haughty and a quarrelſome temper, a proneneſs to revenge and miſchief, are moſt fatal to the character and happineſs of youth, and afford the moſt unfavourable prognoſtic of their riper years, "Men are but children of a larger growth." Thoſe habits that are formed, and thoſe propenſities that are diſcovered in youth, ordinarily prevail through the whole of life. Such ſtudents as you are here, ſuch citizens you will prove to the republic. If you now acquire a love of order, juſtice, decency and obliging behaviour, you will be the delight of your parents, and the ornaments and ſupports of the ſtate; but if you indulge pride and revenge; if you are prone to quarrel, deſpiſe, and fight with one another, what elſe can be expected from the growth of ſuch habits, but that you ſhould become the grief of your parents, a diſgrace to your maſters and friends, and the peſts and firebrands of every ſociety? Make your choice between theſe extremes.

We do not indeed expect from your early years, the coolneſs, the prudence and gravity of advanced age. Such errors as ariſe from the natural warmth, the innocent gaiety, and even the levity of youth, may be eaſily pardoned: but we hope you will conſider that you are no longer children; that by your admiſſion into this ſociety, and being engaged in the ſtudies and employments of men, you are conſidered as ſubjects of moral government, and ſuſceptible of the principles of law and order. You have already in a good meaſure the command of yourſelves, and are capable of diſcerning and being conſcious when you

you are in the wrong. With these capacities you may avoid the follies of childhood, and contract those habits of attention and application that are proper for your age, and favourable to your progress in your studies.

Idleness and trifling are the bane of youth, both with respect to learning and morals: these habits prevent progress, excite quarrels, and encourage the grossest corruption of manners. They are the beginning of vices and of sorrows, and can not be too much checked and discouraged. Trifling is a perverted activity, which in every event leads to evil, and tends either to meanness or malice. Let me warn you especially against one vice, which is often prevalent among youth, and indicates or promotes the worst dispositions; we mean the practice of inciting or tempting one another to evil, and prompting them to deeds of malice or revenge —To sow discord among brethren, to irritate the corruptions and evil passions of men, is the employment of the devil, and ought to be held in the utmost abhorrence by all who would be wise or happy.

Magnanimity and dignity of behaviour are virtues that ought to be in high esteem with youth, as they lay the foundations of a good character, and prevent our age from blushing for the meanness of our early years. But it is of the greatest consequence to form just notions of these virtues, and to be well informed wherein real magnanimity consists. It is not in contempt of others, or proneness to revenge, or being the plague or terror of society. On the contrary, a person of true magnanimity will always be just to the merits of others, and will reckon nothing so disgraceful as what is unjust, and injurious to the rights of others; and will be ashamed of every thing that is unworthy of human nature, or hurtful to the order of society: he will be mild and gentle to others, and will abstain from injuring them, for his own sake as well as for theirs. He will not leave it in the power of every one to tempt him to indecent and passionate behaviour, nor disgrace himself because another is injurious: but despising the ignoble passion of revenge, he will avoid the society of the wicked, and associate with those who are capable of instructing and pleasing him by their example, and incapable of tempting him to indecency by injury.

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The moſt effectual antidote againſt quarrelling and mean behaviour, is diligence and application to your ſtudies: all the vices and miſeries of youth ariſe uniformly from ignorance and triffling. If you are idle, your lives will be at once unprofitable and unpleaſant. As an additional incitement to diligence, we would ſuggeſt to you the advantages you enjoy as ſtudents of this ſeminary, and the diſadvantages you muſt labour under from its yet infant ſtate. Both theſe ought to incite you to diligence, that you may improve the one, and ſurmount or compenſate for the other. At preſent you have leiſure and opportunity of profiting by books and inſtructors; but as theſe cannot yet be afforded you in ſuch numbers and variety as is to be wiſhed, on this account you ought to uſe more diligence to profit by the opportunities you have; and the fewer theſe are at preſent, the more honour will your diligence and ſucceſs reflect upon yourſelves, and on this new ſociety.

If you ever hope to proſper in learning, you will not content yourſelves with reading thoſe parts only of claſſic authors that are prelected to you by your maſters, and of which you are to give an account to them. By confining yourſelves to theſe, you effectually diſappoint their intentions, and render their pains uſeleſs to yourſelves. By making you acquainted with a part, they intended to make you capable of reading the whole. There is no underſtanding the merit, nor profiting by the talents of an author, by conſulting extracts or detached parts; you cannot have time to read all that is excellent in them at ſchool; and I know from experience and obſervation, that a diligent boy will go through the whole of an author in a ſhorter time than the unequal abilities of a claſs will get through that part that is taught in public.

Although the rules of grammar and conſtruction are neceſſary in order to underſtand foreign languages, you muſt not think you have done when you have made yourſelves maſters of theſe. It remains to attend to the ſenſe, the hiſtory, the ſentiment, and the beauties of thought and language; to enter into the ſcope and ſpirit of the writer, to diſcern his excellencies and to detect his weakneſs, or that of the times in which he lived. The claſſics are uſeful, not from their being written in dead languages, or becauſe it coſts a great deal of pains to read

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them: but they are valuable as models of juſt thinking, examples of true taſte, and monuments of the wiſdom and capacity of antient nations, and have been the delight and wonder of many ſucceſſive generations.

You ought always to remember that real learning does not conſiſt in acquiring a great many confuſed and indigeſted ideas, nor in performing public exerciſes with ſuch apparent propriety as to perſuade others that you are learned: far leſs does it conſiſt in the uſe of uncouth and harſh terms, which are not familiar to ordinary underſtandings; but that it conſiſts in the exerciſe and application of the powers of the mind, the improvement of our intuitive as well as our active faculties, in the knowledge and diſcerning of truth, and ſuch an acquaintance with human nature, and its excellencies and defects, its acquiſitions and hiſtory, as may fit us for the right conduct of life, and for promoting the happineſs of ourſelves and others.

In order to profit by reading, meditation and attention muſt be joined with it; we muſt not paſs by any thing that we do not underſtand, or content ourſelves with a ſingle reading of what is uſeful, excellent, or neceſſary; and we ought to labour to retain what we have read, becauſe it is only that which we retain that can be profitable to us in future. Inattentive and deſultory reading is only a more active idleneſs, and a more decent mode of triffling. It is better to ſhut the book as ſoon as attention fails, than to accuſtom ourſelves to read without it.

A fooliſh truſting to public exerciſes has been the ruin of many ſtudents. To confine ourſelves to our preſcribed leſſons, and our ſtudies to the public hours, argues a narrow mind, deſtitute of ambition, and inſenſible of the excellence and charms of true learning. Poor and ſcanty muſt be the attainments of the pretended ſtudent, who feigns attention in public, and is idle and negligent in private! This is rendering public exerciſes entirely uſeleſs, and thwarting the intention of your inſtructors. All that can be done in public is to preſcribe general rules to remove difficulties, to caution againſt errors, and ſuggeſt uſeful hints and directions: but the main buſineſs of learning is to be compaſſed only by private ſtudy and meditation; and the ſtudent who does not apply his diligence in private, miſunderſtands the true nature and de-

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ſign of public inſtructions. Thoſe parents are likewiſe greatly miſtaken who inſiſt that their children ſhould be kept to long confinement and attendance, ſo as to leave them neither time, ſpirits nor inclination for private ſtudy. It is impoſſible that any ſhould be made ſcholars in this manner. Such injunctions diſcover a deep ignorance of human nature, as if it were poſſible to teach boys againſt their will, or force them into learning by whipping and impriſonment. Theſe methods may readily procure a rooted averſion for learning, as it is certain they render progreſs in it utterly unattainable and impracticable; but they will never make boys in love with ſtudy, or ambitious to excel in knowledge. Even in the loweſt claſſes, the ſtudent muſt prepare his leſſon at home, if he expects to be able to pleaſe his maſter, or keep up with his claſs; but ſuch regulations as leave no time for this, deprive the ſtudent of opportunities of profiting, and oblige the maſter to labour in vain.

In order to diſcover the genius and capacity of ſtudents, and to ſuggeſt uſeful hints for conducting their ſtudies and regulating their conduct, I am convinced that private acquaintance and converſation are of great uſe. It wil therefore be agreeable for me to receive viſits from all of the ſtudents, as often as their ſtudies and mine will permit, and to ſuggeſt to them what may be uſeful, as well as to reſolve their doubts and difficulties, being determined to act as the private preceptor, as well as the public inſtructor of every ſtudent, without exception or reſpect of perſons, who comes to this ſeminary in queſt of uſeful knowledge.

As concord and order are the ſoul and ſtrength of every ſociety, and peculiarly neceſſary in a ſeminary for the ſtudy of letters, we hope that every ſtudent will reckon it his honour to ſtudy theſe with the greateſt care; and to attain theſe you ought to reflect how diſgraceful it is to diſturb ſociety, and to appear impatient of order and equal ſociety: It will be our part to render all of you equal juſtice and encouragement, but it will depend on your conduct to render our labours pleaſant and unprofitable. Beware of pride, from which contention cometh; abhor injuſtice and inſulting manners, and avoid all indecent and provoking expreſſions. Remember that your character as well as your ſucceſs in learning, depends on

your preſent behaviour; and that if you do not ſhew yourſelves regular, well-bred and peaceable ſtudents, there can be little hope of your becoming uſeful or eſtimable citizens of the ſtate.

As your time is your greateſt treaſure, and may be employed to the beſt account, we would earneſtly recommend a prudent and thrifty improvement of it. For this purpoſe you ought to riſe early, and beware of ſpending too much of it in unneceſſary exerciſes or childiſh recreations. You have much to do, and unleſs you apply to your ſtudies betimes, you muſt be great loſers. Beſides, ſauntering and idleneſs are inimical to habits of application; and by neglecting to ſtudy, you may ſoon become incapable of it. If you would practiſe the leſſon of Pythagoras, and examine every evening what you have been doing all day, you would diſcover the value of time, and the folly of idleneſs, by obſerving how little you have done, which may lead to a better improvement of time for the future.

You ought never to forget that all true learning is ſubordinate and conducive to morals and uſefulneſs. It is not in order that you may be admired for your talents that you parents have beſtowed on you benefits of a liberal education. They expect that you ſhould become virtuous, orderly and uſeful members of ſociety; that you ſhould know how to eſteem true excellence, to revere truth and honour, to form yourſelves upon the beſt models, to deſpiſe every thing that is mean and vicious, to delight in promoting the happineſs of others, to be lovers of peace, to form friendſhip with the virtuous and worthy, to avoid the ſociety of the wicked, and to merit and command the eſteem of the wiſer part of your fellow citizens.

Young people are apt to imagine that they have little to do with religion, and that it is time enough to think of that in mature life; but this is a grievous miſtake. "Train up a child," ſays Solomon, "in the way he "ſhould go, and when he is old, he will not depart "from it." "Even a child is known by its way, whe-"ther it be pure, and whether it be right." Young as you are, you have a conſcience; you are ſubjects of moral diſcipline, and ſuſceptible of good or bad moral characters. You know not whether you may live to ma-

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ture age, and what ſhall become of your ſouls if you die in an ignorant, thoughtleſs, and irreligious ſtate? We preſume that your parents have taught you to know and honour the God who made you, to revere his name, and to pray to him daily, for the pardon of your ſins, the purifying of your natures, and final happineſs and ſalvation through Jeſus Chriſt. We hope you are inſtructed in the neceſſity of holineſs and virtue as the only means to fit you for eternal life. It ſhall be our endeavour to ſecond the leſſons and intentions, as well as to fulfil the wiſhes of your parents, ſo far as in our power, by ſuggeſting to you, as occaſion offers, ſuitable advices for your moral and religious conduct in life; and in ſo doing we are ſure of pleaſing them by endeavouring to promote your real happineſs. Even the wicked and thoughtleſs parents would be ſorry to ſee their children growing up in vicious habits; and nothing can exceed the ſorrow of virtuous and Chriſtian parents when their children walk not in the ways of God. Give joy to your parents, and to your maſters and friends, by an early application to religious knowledge and practice; read the word of God with care, reverence, and attention: pray to God for wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding, and ye ſhall not aſk in vain. Be aſſured that it is your higheſt honour to honour God, to thank him for his benefits, and keep his commandments; you will be more worthy of the eſteem of your neighbours, if you pray to God morning and evening, if you ſtudy to pleaſe him, and to keep the ſabbath-day holy, to abſtain from all mean and vicious conduct. You may aſſure yourſelves that ſuch a conduct will contribute no leſs to your progreſs in learning than your improvement in virtue. God is the father of our ſpirits, and ought to be acknowledged and worſhipped in that character. He made our ſouls, with all their wonderful powers; and their improvement and exerciſe muſt depend on his bounty. The knowledge of the plowman and the mechanic is attributed in ſcripture to the teaching of God, and that large and comprehenſive knowledge which diſtinguiſhed King Solomon, is expreſsly ſaid to have been the gift of God. And who elſe can give it? As in religion; ſo likewiſe in learning, though Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it belongs to God only to give the increaſe. You are groſsly miſtaken if you imagine

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that a religious life is melancholy or disagreeable; on the contrary, it is the only road to true pleasure and satisfaction. To have God for your friend, your father and defender, is true dignity, as well as solid peace and confidence. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good, keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile, depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of God is against them that do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth. Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.